

# Social Studies Learning Activity Types<sup>1,2</sup>

Of the forty-two social studies learning activity types that have been identified to date, thirteen are focused upon helping students build their knowledge of social studies content, concepts, and processes. Twenty-nine provide students with opportunities to express their understanding in a variety of ways. Six of these knowledge expression activity types emphasize *convergent* learning and twenty-three of these activity types offer students opportunities to express their understanding in *divergent* ways. The three sets of activity types (knowledge building, convergent knowledge expression, and divergent knowledge expression) are presented in the tables that follow, including compatible technologies that may be used to support each type of learning activity.

## Knowledge Building Activity Types

As the table of activity types below shows, teachers have a variety of options available to assist students in building social studies content and process knowledge.

**Table 1: Knowledge Building Activity Types**

Activity Type	Brief Description	Possible Technologies
Read Text	Students extract information from textbooks, historical documents, census data, etc.; both print-based and digital formats	Web sites, electronic books
View Presentation	Students gain information from teachers, guest speakers, and peers; synchronous/asynchronous, oral or multimedia	PowerPoint, Photostory, iMovie, MovieMaker, Inspiration, videoconferencing
View Images	Students examine both still and moving (video, animations) images; print-based or digital format	PowerPoint, Word, Photostory, Bubbleshare, Tabblo, Flickr
Listen to Audio	Students listen to recordings of speeches, music, radio broadcasts, oral histories, and lectures; digital or non-digital	Podcasts ("Great Speeches in History," etc.), Audacity, Garageband, Odeo, Evoca, Podcast People, iTunes
Group Discussion	In small to large groups, students engage in dialogue with their peers; synchronous/asynchronous	BlackBoard, discussion in Wikispaces, eboards, Moodle
Field Trip	Students travel to physical or virtual sites; synchronous/asynchronous	Virtual fieldtrips, Photostory to develop their own virtual iMovie

<sup>1</sup> Suggested citation (APA format, 6<sup>th</sup> ed.):

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		tours	
Simulation	Students engage in paper-based or digital experiences which mirror the complexity of the real world	<i>Civilization, Revolution!, Fantasy Congress</i>	
Debate	Students discuss opposing viewpoints; formal/informal; structured/unstructured; synchronous/asynchronous	BlackBoard, discussion in Wikispaces, e-boards <i>Moodle</i>	
Research	Students gather, analyze, and synthesize information using print-based and digital sources	Digital archives, Google Notebook, <i>Inspiration</i> to structure <i>Delicious, Diigo</i>	
Conduct an Interview	Face to face, on the telephone, or via email students question someone on a chosen topic; may be digitally recorded and shared	Audacity, MovieMaker, iMovie, digital camera <i>GarageBand</i>	
Artifact-Based Inquiry	Students explore a topic using physical or virtual artifacts	Digital archives	
Data-Based Inquiry	Using print-based and digital data available online students pursue original lines of inquiry	CIA World Factbook, Thomas, census data, Excel, Inspire Data	
Historical Chain	Students sequence print and digital documents in chronological order	Bubbleshare, Photostory, Moviemaker	
Historical Weaving	Students piece together print and digital documents to develop a story	Word, Scrapblog, Google Pages, Historical Scene Investigation (HSI) <i>mixbook</i>	
Historical Prism	Students explore print-based and digital documents to understand multiple perspectives on a topic	Wikispaces, Google Pages, Inspiration using links	

### Knowledge Expression Activity Types

Teachers are able to determine what students have learned by reviewing their “performances of understanding” (Wiske, 1998) -- students’ expressions of knowledge related to the learning goals targeted. Opportunities for students to express their knowledge can be incorporated during a unit of study (as part of formative assessment) or at the conclusion of a unit (as a summative assessment). At times, social studies teachers deem it appropriate for all students to come to a similar understanding of a course topic. This kind of understanding is expressed by engaging in *convergent knowledge expression activities*, as detailed in the table below.

**Table 2:** Convergent Knowledge Expression Activity Types

Activity Type	Brief Description	Possible Technologies
Answer Questions	Students respond to questions using traditional question sets or worksheets, or through the use of an electronic discussion board, email or chat	Inspiration, Word, BlackBoard, e-boards <i>Google Docs (Forms)</i>
Create a Timeline	Students sequence events on a printed or	Timeliner, Photostory,



	electronic timeline or through a Web page or multimedia presentation	Word, Bubbleshare <i>SlideShare</i>
Create a Map	Students label existing maps or produce their own; print-based materials or digitally	PowerPoint, Google Earth
Complete Charts/Tables	Students fill in teacher-created charts and tables or create their own in traditional ways or using digital tools	Word, Inspiration, PowerPoint
Complete a Review Activity	Students engage in some form of question and answer to review content; paper-based to game-show format using multimedia presentation tools	PRS systems, Jeopardy (or other games) on PowerPoint, survey tools like SurveyMonkey <i>PollEverywh</i>
Take a Test	Students demonstrate their knowledge through paper-based, traditional format to computer-generated and scored assessments	scantron forms <i>Quia</i>

While in many cases teachers may want their students to express similar understandings of course content, at other times they will want to encourage students to develop and express their own understandings of a given topic. The following 21 *divergent knowledge expression activity types* afford students opportunities to each share their unique understanding of a topic or concept. They are subdivided into learning activities that are written, visual, conceptual, product-oriented, and participatory.

**Table 3:** Written Divergent Knowledge Expression Activity Types

Activity Type	Brief Description	Possible Technologies
Write an Essay	Students compose a structured written response to a prompt; paper and pencil or word processed; text-based or multimedia	Word, Inspiration, Wikispaces (to track contributions from multiple authors)
Write a Report	Students author a report on a topic in traditional or more creative format using text or multimedia elements	Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Google Pages
Generate an Historical Narrative	Using historical documents and secondary source information, students develop their own story of the past	Word, Wikispaces or Google Docs (to track contributions from multiple authors), blogs
Craft a Poem	Students create poetry, paper and pencil or word processed; text-based or multimedia	Photostory, Moviemaker, iMovie, PowerPoint, VoiceThread, <i>Tikatok</i>
Create a Diary	Students write from a first-hand perspective about an event from the past; paper and pencil or digital format	Blogs, Word, Google Docs, Google Pages <i>Scrapblog, Mixbook</i>